

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #2015/01 2831359
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 101359Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9443
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6621
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 6500
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 1538
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ OCT MONTEVIDEO 6829
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0830
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 002015

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: GETTING READY FOR THE OCTOBER 28
ELECTIONS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 01952

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Over 20 million Argentines are expected to turn up at polling stations on October 28 to cast their votes for president, vice president and, in many locations, for governor, mayor and legislative offices. If required, a second presidential round would be held on November 25. The National Electoral Board of Argentina announced October 3 that it was recommending three new measures aimed at guaranteeing transparency in the October 28 presidential elections. The various political parties may be allowed to supervise the recording of vote tallies as they are entered into the main database, have easier access to the government funds allocated to each party, and oversee the delivery of ballots to each voting station. Opposition candidates have raised concerns over possible fraud in the coming elections, but local electoral experts are skeptical that such fraud could be effectively carried out on a large scale. Given the substantial lead in the polls by front-runner Cristina Kirchner, government-perpetrated fraud in the presidential race would seem superfluous, but some observers say one cannot discount the chance for some local problems, perhaps aimed at boosting the front-runner over the key 40% mark. This cable contains a primer on how the Argentine presidential election will work. END SUMMARY.

Anti-Fraud Measures

12. (SBU) The National Electoral Board of Argentina announced October 3 that it was recommending three new measures aimed at guaranteeing transparency in the October 28 presidential elections. They recommend that the various political parties be allowed to supervise the recording of vote tallies as they are entered into the main database, have easier access to the government funds allocated to each party, and oversee the delivery of ballots to each voting station. Center-left leader and presidential candidate Elisa Carrio, currently tied for second place in the polls, was quoted on October 3 as saying that she would be satisfied with implementation of these measures to ensure the presidential elections are free of fraud. The Interior Ministry still has to approve and implement the Board's recommendations, and some local analysts are skeptical that the Ministry will comply.

Electronic Vote-Count Monitoring

¶3. (SBU) The National Electoral Board said the Interior Ministry should authorize each political party to supervise the recording of vote tallies by giving them access to the software used by Indra, the Spanish firm contracted to tally the votes, to follow electronically as the voting-station tallies are entered into the main elections database. The elections board asked that the software and instructions on how it will be used at each step of the elections be passed to all parties. National Elections Board director Alejandro Tullio said "fraud is not possible because our system is armored against it. The technology and controls we use do not allow for the manipulation in any way of an election."

Easier Access to Funding

¶4. (SBU) The Board also announced that the Interior Ministry should facilitate access to the government funding allocated to political parties. Tullio said that the GOA is up-to-date in with making these funds available and added that some parties -- he mentioned the center-left Civic Coalition and center-right One Alliance -- have still not provided their bank account numbers and routing information that would allow the government to deposit the funds.

Verifying the Presence of Ballots

¶5. (SBU) The Electoral Board also said party officials should be allowed to supervise the delivery of ballots to each voting station to make sure that all ballots are presented to each voter.

International Observers Unlikely

¶6. (SBU) Center-left leader and presidential candidate Elisa Carrio was quoted on October 3 as saying that she would be satisfied with implementation of the National Electoral Board's recommendations to ensure the presidential elections are free of fraud. During her September trip to Washington, the Organization of American States (OAS) reportedly had told Carrio that it could not deploy an electoral observation mission without a formal request from the GOA. The GOA continues to maintain that the voting system is secure. An unidentified government source was quoted October 3 in La Nacion as saying, "there is no legal basis for requesting observers," which La Nacion interpreted as alluding to the lack of legislation that specifically addresses election observers.

A Primer on Argentina's Presidential Election

¶7. (SBU) Argentina's Constitution and National Electoral Code guarantee universal suffrage and dictate the election process. All Argentines between ages 18 and 70 are required to vote; exceptions include condemned prisoners, the mentally ill, and people who are more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) from their voting station on election day. As of June 30 (the latest data available), 27,026,665 Argentines were registered and qualified to vote in the October elections. In the last presidential elections, approximately 78% of eligible voters participated, the lowest turnout since the restoration of democracy in 1983 (despite mandatory voting). Voting stations will be open from 8 am to 6 pm across the country. The federal capital district and the surrounding province of Buenos Aires represent 47.7% of the total national vote, with the capital city holding 10.2% and the province 37.2%. Cordoba province and Santa Fe each represent 8.8%; Mendoza 4.2%; Tucuman 3.4%; Entre Rios 3.2%; Salta and

Chaco each 2.6%; Corrientes 2.4%; Misiones 2.3%; Santiago del Estero 2.0%; San Juan 1.6%; Jujuy 1.5%; Rio Negro 1.4%; Neuquen and Formosa each 1.2%; Chubut 1.1%; San Luis 1.0%; Catamarca and La Pampa each 0.9%, La Rioja 0.8%, Santa Cruz 0.5%, and Tierra del Fuego 0.3%.

¶8. (SBU) The elections are overseen by the National Elections Board, whose president is Alejandro Tullio. The board also has representatives -- known as "fiscales de mesa" -- from each political party who help observe voting and vote counting. The smaller political parties often do not have enough resources or supporters to post observers at each voting station in the country. When a voter enters the voting station, a "fiscal de mesa" checks the voter's identification, registers the voter, and directs the voter to the voting room. Voters enter the "dark room" ("cuarto oscuro") where they find tables with piles of each ballot laid out. The voter chooses the ballot for which he intends to vote, folds it, and places it in an envelope. The sealed envelope is then placed in the ballot box just outside the dark room. If a voter wishes to vote for candidates from different ballots, he must tear the ballots to separate the candidates he wants. Then the torn pieces of ballot are placed in the voting envelope.

¶9. (SBU) When voting concludes, the election authorities open the ballot boxes and count the envelopes inside, comparing the number to the list of voters that signed in. The vote tally is recorded on five documents, all signed by the elections authorities and fiscales de mesa present. One copy is placed in that station's ballot box, which is then sent to the National Electoral Board of each district for a final count. Normally, the election results are certified within two days of the election. Another copy of the vote tally is sent via Argentine mail representatives to one of 38 data input centers controlled by Spanish firm Indra where the provisional count is done and released the same day. Each

political party designates another set of representatives to audit the input of the tallies into the provisional count. The inputted vote tallies are sent to the National Computer Center, part of the Communications Secretariat, where another set of political party representatives oversee the final count and certification of the elections results.

¶10. (SBU) In order to win in the first round, the lead candidate must receive 45% of the votes, or 40% with at least a 10-point lead over the second-place finisher. If these conditions are not met, then the top two candidates compete in a runoff election (scheduled for November 25 -- only 15 days before the December 10 inauguration) where the candidate with the most votes wins. This will be Argentina's sixth presidential election since the return of democracy in 1983: Raul Alfonsin was elected in 1983, Carlos Menem in 1989 and again in 1995, Fernando De la Rúa in 1999, and Nestor Kirchner in 2003.

¶11. (SBU) On October 2, Elections Board president Tullio announced that the 2007 presidential elections will cost twice as much as the 2003 elections. The GOA is anticipating a cost of 200 million pesos (USD 66.6 million at current rates of exchange), more than double the 80 million spent in 2003 and 50% more than the 2005 legislative elections (130 million pesos). This figure includes a possible second round on November 25, which comprises 15% of the estimated cost. The 200 million includes: 35 million paid to political parties for campaigns, 38.6 million paid to Indra to manage the vote data, 40 million for logistics, 10 million for voter registration, 9 million for 150,000 electoral officials (who are called upon much like jury duty in the U.S. to work at the voting stations), 10 million more than in 2003 for printing of the ballots, 18 million for electoral judges and courts nationwide, 27 million for security, 6 million for the purchase of new ballot boxes and envelopes.

¶12. (SBU) In the push to collect as many of the key 9,700,000 votes (37% of the national vote total) in Buenos Aires province, presidential candidate Cristina Kirchner and gubernatorial candidate Daniel Scioli will be represented on 250 separate ballots/lists. Ninety-two mayoral candidates are vying for 30 positions in the greater Buenos Aires area, while 158 candidates will compete in 104 districts in the more rural and out-lying areas of the province. Only some of the candidates seeking reelection were authorized to run as FPV candidates. The others are running with the support of small local parties or the Radical Civic Union (UCR). The confluence of ballots in the "dark room" is likely to confuse voters, who may not be ready to select their candidate from among several ballots, but Kirchner and Scioli will gain votes no matter which mayoral candidate is selected. (Voters traditionally hesitate to split/tear ballots.)

¶13. (SBU) Misiones province will also present voters with a confusing array of ballots on October 28 -- 18,000 candidates are vying for positions in the provincial elections on 1,949 ballots. Misiones is one of the few provinces to still allow double simultaneous voting, which employs an open party-list proportional representation method of voting. (Each party is considered a "lema," and under that lema any number of candidates may run for public office. The votes cast for each candidate are totaled for the "lema," and the lema with the most votes wins. The candidate with the most votes under that lema then wins the race. The system favors large parties with many candidates under their lemas.) 653,846 residents of Misiones are eligible and registered to vote, making the ratio of voter to candidate 36 to one. The election authorities have had to get creative to fit all of the candidates on the ballots. In the capital city of Posadas, for example, each ballot has 67 names and measures 9 centimeters high by 57 centimeters long. The "cuarto oscuro" had to be moved to a large hall to accommodate the numerous tables needed to display the 257 ballots in Posadas alone -- the room usually measures seven meters squared.

¶14. (SBU) Provincial elections will also be held on October 28 in Formosa, Jujuy, La Pampa, Mendoza, Salta, and Santa Cruz.

Comment

¶15. (C) Most analysts here are not expecting any surprises on October 28. Senator Kirchner maintains a significant lead in nearly all polls, and the electoral system's structure benefits Kirchner's party, as most voters are unlikely to rip ballots to vote for candidates in different parties. Kirchner also benefits from the confusing array of ballots in many places, particularly in Buenos Aires and Misiones provinces, where votes cast for any of the myriad FPV candidates add to Senator Kirchner's total. The National Electoral Board's recommended transparency measures have been accepted by some of the opposition, but with about three weeks until the actual vote, it remains to be seen if the government will be able to implement them fully, and if the Board's good intentions are sustainable until October 28. In the presidential race, front-runner Cristina Kirchner's substantial lead in the polls suggests that fraud will not be necessary and that local electoral experts say that large-scale fraud has not previously been a problem in presidential elections. Some argue, however, that the Kirchner machine is capable of cutting corners in key districts to ensure that Cristina gets past the 40% threshold required for a first-round victory. END COMMENT.
WAYNE